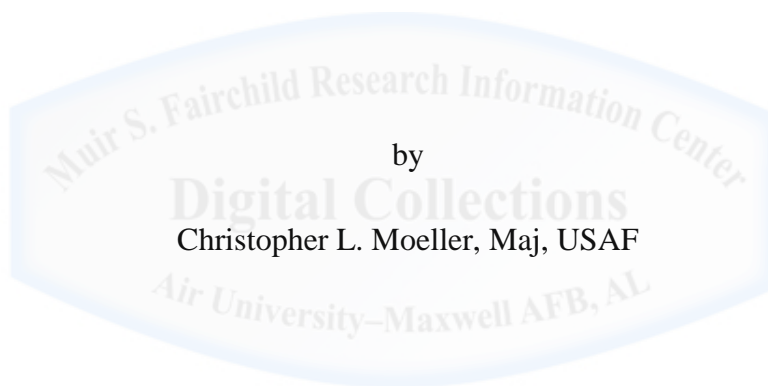


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AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

DEVELOPING LEADERS VIA REFLECTIVE MENTORING



A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

Advisor: Dr. Tony V. Klucking

Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

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Disclaimer

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ABSTRACT

For most military members, deliberate leadership study and development is confined to periodic attendance at formal military education or as a second-order effect from training and experience. However, to fully develop a service member's leadership attributes, leadership development needs to be a continuous process throughout a service member's career. Mentoring is a highly effective way to bridge the gaps in leadership development that exist between professional military education, training, and experience. Reflective mentoring that focuses on the personal and professional development of the mentee may be the most effective way to continually develop military leaders outside the military education system. Reflective mentorship is unique from counseling or coaching and goes beyond just providing career guidance to a mentee. In a reflective mentoring relationship, the mentor facilitates reflection on topics that develop the mentee's leadership attributes. For reflective mentoring to be successful, the mentor must understand how the mentee learns and tailor mentorship to optimize the learning and development of the mentee. Understanding and addressing key assumptions of how adults learn enables a successful and rewarding mentoring relationship for the mentee and mentor. There are many tools and techniques available to facilitate reflective mentoring, but the relationship must remain focused on the learning and development of the mentee. A mentor who focuses on the development of a mentee helps build leaders to carry the joint force into the future.

General Stephen Lorenz, former commander of the Air Force's Air Education and Training Command, stated that his hobby is studying leadership.¹ Unfortunately, not every service member shares General Lorenz's love for this topic enough to devote his or her personal time to studying leaders and leadership principles. In fact, for most service members, deliberate leadership study and development is confined to periodic professional military education (PME) or occurs as a second order effect of training and experience. Mentoring is a potentially highly effective way to bridge the gaps in leadership development that exist between PME, training, and experience. To be successful in leadership development, mentoring must transcend the simple passing of information from a superior to a subordinate. Reflective mentoring, a type of mentoring that focuses on the personal and professional development of the mentee, may be the most effective way to continually develop military leaders outside the PME system. In a reflective mentoring relationship, the mentor must understand how the mentee learns and make that learning his or her primary focus. There are no set guidelines for developing leaders through mentoring, but the mentor has many tools available to achieve the overall goal of developing service members into potential leaders who embody leadership attributes valued by each of the individual military services and by the joint force as a whole.

The Role of Mentoring

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Martin Dempsey, identified six desired leader attributes (DLAs) required for successful joint military leaders that act as a guideline for service member personal and professional development.² The DLAs General Dempsey lists are directed toward officers, but apply to every military member who will lead the within the military.³ The six DLAs codified by General Dempsey are: (1) the ability to understand the security environment and contributions of all instruments of national power; (2)

the ability to anticipate and respond to surprise and uncertainty; (3) the ability to anticipate and recognize change and lead transitions; (4) the ability to operate on intent through trust, empowerment, and understanding; (5) the ability to make ethical decisions based on shared values of the Profession of Arms; and (6) the ability to think critically and strategically in applying joint warfighting principles and concepts to joint operations.⁴ A review of the current professional military education (PME) system by the Military Education Coordination Council highlights that the development of the DLAs for each service member requires continual nurturing throughout a service member's career.⁵

Currently, the only deliberate personal and professional development that all service members get is one-size-fits all PME courses attended at set points during a career. However, General Dempsey said it best during a 2012 *Joint Education White Paper* when he stated, "We must assist every service member in becoming a life-long learner, always hungry for new knowledge and deeper understanding. Learning opportunities must occur in every aspect of service and should not be restricted to episodic attendance in formal schools."⁶ To fully develop the potential of military leaders, learning needs to occur outside of service designed programs.

An often overlooked, yet highly effective, way to develop leaders outside of formal PME programs is mentoring. The Air Force, Army, and Marines each have service level documents highlighting who should mentor, how to mentor, and why mentoring is important (Air Force Manual (AFMAN) 36-2643, Army Regulation 600-100, and Marine Corps Order 1500. 58). The Navy does not have a service level instruction on mentoring, but some naval commands have developed instructions on mentoring following the 2007 Chief of Naval Operations vision to develop 21st century leaders.⁷ Each of these documents stresses how it is the responsibility of all leaders, regardless of rank, to develop their subordinates through mentoring.⁸ AFMAN 36-2643,

Air Force Mentoring Program, puts it most clearly, when it states, “Mentoring is an inherent responsibility of leadership.”⁹ The services have made it clear that one of the responsibilities of a leader is not to develop great followers, but to develop future leaders.

The Army, Air Force, and Marines each defines mentoring differently, but the consensus is that mentorship is a developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience.¹⁰ However, within the military, mentoring is often synonymous with counseling and coaching despite the fact that these three development processes are significantly different. Both counseling and coaching focus more on a subordinate’s performance in his or her current duty than on the subordinate’s long term development. Through counseling, superiors seek to improve performance or increase potential of subordinates by setting expectations and providing guidance on improving or correcting current behavior.¹¹ An example of counseling is a superior providing feedback to a subordinate midway between annual performance reports. Similarly, coaching relies on teaching to improve the capabilities of a subordinate on a set task.¹² It tends to be one-sided in that the more experienced leader seeks to increase the knowledge of the less experienced subordinate.¹³ An example of coaching is a commander teaching a junior officer how to effectively write performance reports.

While mentoring may include both counseling and coaching, it surpasses them in that it has the potential to develop a subordinate’s leadership traits to a level above and beyond what is required for his or her current duty.¹⁴ It goes beyond increasing performance and filling knowledge gaps; it focuses on the professional and personal development of the mentee. In fact, the definition of a mentor is someone who takes a vested interest in guiding the development of a mentee personally and professionally over time.¹⁵ To mentor successfully, a leader must

understand the uniqueness of mentoring versus counseling and coaching and not lose sight of the primary objective – the development of the mentee.

According to the Air Force *Professional Development Guide*, “Air Force mentoring covers a wide range of areas, such as career guidance, technical and professional development, leadership, Air Force history and heritage, air and space power doctrine, strategic vision, and contributions to joint warfighting.”¹⁶ As a result, mentoring can take many forms, but to develop the leadership attributes of a service member, it must be more than just the passing of knowledge from a more experienced mentor to a less experienced mentee. One area that is missing from many mentoring relationships, one that can have substantial benefits to the development of a service member, is a focus on the intellectual growth and development of the mentee. When mentoring focus on intellectual development it cultivates leaders outside of the PME system. Currently, service mentoring programs focus primarily on career path guidance rather than on the professional development of the mentee and although career guidance is one goal of mentoring, it should not be the only area covered.¹⁷

The model of mentoring that goes beyond the mere passing of information and stimulates deeper thought and intellectual development is known as reflective mentoring. Reflective mentoring is, “[A]n intentional, nurturing and insightful process that provides powerful growth experience for the both the mentor and mentee.”¹⁸ A reflective mentoring program developed by a mentor may cover a variety of topics, but the specifics of what the mentor uses to promote reflection are not as important as remembering that the focus remains on the learning and development of the mentee.¹⁹ This type of mentoring will develop and nurture skills within the mentee and encourage the life-long learning that General Dempsey desires for service members.

For reflective mentoring to be effective, the mentoring relationship shifts to learner-centered mentoring where the mentee has a more active role in the relationship and away from the supervisor-subordinate paradigm.²⁰ The mentor becomes a facilitator rather than an authority figure. Lois Zachary, a professional in adult development and learning, notes that this style of mentoring shifts “from a product-oriented model, characterized by the transfer of knowledge, to a process-oriented relationship involving knowledge acquisition, application, and critical reflection.”²¹

The Adult Learner

To develop an effective reflective mentoring relationship, it is vital for the mentor to understand how an adult, in this case the mentee, learns. This understanding enables the highest potential for success, which in reflective mentoring is characterized as internalization of knowledge and ideas covered. During this type of interaction, the mentor must put aside his or her biases and understand that his or her role is not that of a teacher of information, but one of a facilitator of learning.²² To be able to do this, the mentor must consider what enables effective adult learning.

The study of how adults learn and what makes an adult learner different from child learners is termed andragogy. The way children learn, or pedagogy, is the form of education most Americans are familiar with from formal education in which the student takes a submissive role following the teacher’s instructions and has little say in the educational process.²³ In a pedagogical setting, the student becomes a passive learner and, in spite of participation and interaction, may or may not truly internalize the information.²⁴ When attempting reflective mentoring within the military, it is easy to adapt a pedagogical approach because the mentor will generally be of a higher rank or higher in the chain of command, and, as a result, the mentee

assumes the submissive role and waits for the mentor's instructions. This "teacher-student" or "superior-subordinate" interaction does not enable the highest potential for the fullest development of the mentee.

Whereas in pedagogy the focus is on how the teacher transmits information, in andragogy the focus is on the learner.²⁵ The tools and methods used by the teacher are less important in andragogy than how the learner receives and internalizes the information. According to one of the predominant andragogy theorists, Malcolm Knowles, there are six core assumptions of how an adult learns. Addressing each of these six assumptions maximizes the learning potential of an adult and enables the development of an effective reflective mentoring relationship.²⁶

One assumption of adult learners is that they need to know why they need to learn something before they will learn it.²⁷ When adults pursue learning on their own, they will spend considerable time determining the benefits they will gain from the new knowledge or skill they are about to learn.²⁸ If the benefit of what they are learning outweighs the cost in time or effort to learn it, they will undertake the learning event. However, if the learner becomes involved in a learning event he or she did not choose to pursue, the facilitator of the learning must ensure the learner understands why it is important he or she learn the new information or skill.²⁹

Ensuring a subordinate knows why he or she needs to learn something is paramount in counseling, coaching, and mentoring. In counseling and coaching demonstrating need is straight forward; the superior highlights a lack of skill or performance by the subordinate and emphasizes why the subordinate needs to improve job performance. However in the case of mentoring it may be more challenging to demonstrate why the mentee needs to know something when it may not directly apply to his or her day-to-day duties. For example, if the mentor recommends that the mentee read a short article about the Cuban missile crisis, it is the responsibility of the mentor to

explain why this is important. The mentee may not be interested in Cold War history and may not see any need for learning about this event. Thus, it is the responsibility of the mentor to explain that the mentee, as a future leader, needs to know how to deal with complex and changing leadership environments and that one way to improve this skill is to analyze the leadership styles of other leaders.

Another assumption of adult learners is that they become ready to learn something when they see how it will help them cope effectively in their lives.³⁰ This assumption implies that the learner must go beyond acknowledging the need to learn something and highlights that adults are not ready to even start learning if they cannot see how the learning process will benefit them in their life.³¹ Readiness to learn is often associated with adults' migration from one life stage to the next, either personally or professionally.³² If adult learners cannot draw a correlation between the learning objectives and their life, they may not learn the information.

To know if a mentee is ready to learn, it is important to understand where a mentee is developmentally in his or her career or personal life. Mentoring the same information and concepts to multiple mentees at different stages will not be as successful as a tailored approach. For example, a mentor wishes to cover joint leadership capabilities by thinking critically about cultural differences among services. The mentor will have more success with an experienced service member with immediate potential to work in a joint planning environment than he or she will have with a young service member who operates primarily at a service tactical level. Regarding the topic of joint leadership capabilities, the experienced service member has a greater learning readiness. However, there are times when a more experienced mentor may see that the mentee is ready to learn something by knowing what lies ahead in the mentee's future, but the mentee cannot see this and thus is not ready. In this situation, it is the responsibility of the

facilitator to induce readiness.³³ This occurs through counseling or career-path mentoring that highlights how the learning applies to the mentee's life.

Another of Knowles' assumptions about adult learners is that adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, including what they are going to learn.³⁴ Adult learners desire inclusion in the development and execution of a learning program and resent having anyone else impose his or her will upon them.³⁵ If adults feel that their sense of self direction is not being respected they will begin to erect mental barriers to learning. Even using simple phrases like "education," "training," or "teaching" will invoke a pedagogical reaction within an adult learner, and he or she will then become a dependent student rather than an active participant in the learning process.³⁶ To ensure respect of a learner's self-direction, a facilitator includes the learner in the direction of a learning program. If during a learning event a learner desires to become more self-directing and play a larger role in the program, the facilitator should allow this as long as the program is still meeting its overall goal.³⁷

The initial establishment of a mentoring relationship is one place where a mentor must pay careful consideration to the learner's self-concept of making his or her own decisions. When establishing a mentoring relationship, a mentor should avoid phrases such as "learning about leadership," and "developmental education." Instead, phrases such as "discuss leadership" and "reflect on our experiences" will invoke an open relationship with the mentee and be less likely to establish a teacher-student environment. Although the mentor may have an idea of what he or she wants the mentee to learn, the mentor should ask the mentee what he or she desires from the relationship, what areas he or she could learn more about, and what his or her goals are for mentoring. As a result, the mentor can still cover many of the topics he or she had

predetermined, but is now able to fit them within the context of areas the mentee desires to learn about.

Additionally, there is flexibility inherent to mentoring that most formal education programs do not have. If the information the mentee desires to learn is not that which the mentor originally planned, the mentor can and should encourage exploration of these new areas.³⁸ The more self-directing the learner becomes, the more in-line the mentoring is with General Dempsey's desire for service members who are, "always hungry for new knowledge and deeper understanding."³⁹ If a mentor has a specific topic he or she would like to discuss, he or she may inject it into the reflective relationship as long as the mentor explains to the mentee why the mentee needs this topic and how it relates to the mentee's goals.

A fourth assumption of adult learners is that adults are life-centered or problem-centered in their learning as opposed to being subject-centered.⁴⁰ Facilitating learning via material that learners can correlate to events in their lives, either personally or professionally, will lead to a higher level of comprehension.⁴¹ Much like the concept of self-direction, developing a successful life-centered mentoring program has much to do with how the mentor presents the material to the learner. For example, if the mentor suggests the mentee review the leadership of key Airman responsible for the creation of a separate Air Force, the mentee may lose interest if he or she feels that this is simply a history lesson. However, if the mentor suggests the mentee think about how to lead during times of instability or transition by looking at some of the Airman responsible for creation of the Air Force, now the mentee feels the material is more applicable and is more willing to learn.

Knowles' fifth assumption of an adult learner is that the quality and quantity of the adult's experience affect how he or she learns.⁴² Effective facilitation of adult learning utilizes this

variation in experience. When members of a small group discussion communicate and share their personal experiences in relation to the discussion topic, they gain a greater and more varied perspective of the discussion topic.⁴³ In one-on-one discussions, such as in a mentor-mentee relationship, the differences in experiences of the facilitator and the learner can have a similar effect. In fact, hearing how a mentee's experience impacts his or her views will give the mentor insight into how subordinate service members' views differ from those of their superiors. A respected difference in experience leads to learning by both the mentor and the mentee.

Ignoring or devaluing an adult learner's experience leads to less participation and a lower degree of learning.⁴⁴ A mentor's challenge during facilitation of learning is to realize that the mentee has different experiences than the mentor and not attempt to homogenize the mentee's ideas with his or her own.⁴⁵ Before beginning a mentoring session, the mentor should reflect on what his or her experiences have been on the topic and try to identify where differences with the mentee's experience may occur.⁴⁶ During a mentoring session, the mentor must ensure the mentee has the opportunity to share his or her experiences, but the mentor must also be willing to share his or her unique experiences. As these experiences begin to diverge, it is vital for the mentor to avoid devaluing the mentee's experience just because the mentor has greater experience.

The increased experience of an adult learner also has the potential to be detrimental to learning. One negative side effect of increased experience is that the adult learner will create beliefs or mental habits that may close his or her mind to new ideas or alternative ways of thinking.⁴⁷ Successful facilitation of learning requires a balance of acknowledging the value of the learner's experience while presenting new ideas.⁴⁸ In mentoring, the mentor must find ways to get the mentee to open his or her mind to new ideas and new ways of thinking. The mentee's

experience sets the mentee's way of thinking and the mentor needs to challenge these ideas. Simple questions such as, "how might someone else look at this?" may be all it takes to break down the barriers caused by experience. The mentor must also acknowledge his or her own mental barriers based on his or her experience and attempt to expand his or her thinking as well to challenge the mentee.

The final assumption of an adult learner proposed by Knowles is that adults respond more to internal pressures than external motivators.⁴⁹ Although external motivators such as promotions do contribute to an adult's desire to learn, internal motivation is more powerful.⁵⁰ Learning will be most effective when an adult feels that new knowledge coincides with his or her goals and desires.⁵¹ Conversely, if the learner faces challenges conflicting with his or her internal motivators, he or she will become less involved in the learning process and less likely to internalize the information.⁵² For example, if the mentee's goal is to improve his or her problem solving skills but the mentoring sessions focus solely on career development, the mentee may become disengaged. To prevent this from happening, the mentor needs to set mentoring goals with the mentee early in the relationship and revisit and revise these goals often.⁵³ If the mentor recognizes a loss of motivation within the mentee, the mentor needs to address this through open discussion. A mentor also needs to recognize whether or not a mentee only seems involved in mentoring solely for external motivational reasons, like promotions or "face-time" with a supervisor.⁵⁴ Although these may be initial motivators for participation in a mentoring program, they will not sustain a lasting relationship of personal and professional development.

Facilitation of reflective mentoring in a way that focuses on mentee learning enables the highest potential for internalization of new knowledge and the development of leaders outside of a formal PME. Conversely, not focusing on the learning process and learning goals is a principal

reason why mentoring relationships fail.⁵⁵ Effectively using mentoring to develop joint leaders personally and professionally relies on continued focus on the learning goals of the mentee.⁵⁶ To accomplish this, the mentor must routinely assess the mentoring process to see if it is in line with the six adult learning assumptions. If the focus is not on the learning of the mentee, adult learning professional Lois Zachary argues, “[M]entoring is reduced to a transaction, the integrity of the learning is compromised, and the relationship is undermined.”⁵⁷

Beyond the benefit of developing leaders for the services, mentoring that focuses on the learning of the mentee has the additional benefit of assisting the mentee in becoming a more self-directed learner. As noted by Knowles, in an andragogical environment, a learner’s concept of self-direction will develop and they will become increasingly more comfortable guiding his or her own learning.⁵⁸ In a mentoring program where the mentee takes responsibility for some of the learning, as in a properly facilitated reflective mentoring relationship, the mentee will become increasingly self-directing.⁵⁹ As a result, the mentee becomes more comfortable and takes more initiative toward developing himself or herself outside of a formal learning environment.

Furthermore, in a well facilitated reflective mentoring program, there are benefits for the mentor as well. Early adult theorist Eduard Lindeman claimed that in an andragogical setting, “it is sometimes difficult to discover who is learning most, the teacher or the students.”⁶⁰ Challenging a mentee to reflect on his or her experiences or think critically about leadership will only lead to enlightening discussions if the mentor also has reflected on the same topic. Increased personal reflection nurtures the mentor’s own growth and development.⁶¹

However, not every mentoring session needs to be a true andragogical interaction where the mentor acts purely as a facilitator. Mentorship will occur along a spectrum between pedagogy

and andragogy based on the mentee's knowledge of the topic.⁶² Mentoring that focuses on career advice for the mentee will generally be more pedagogical with the mentor simply passing knowledge and advice to the mentee. Even within a reflective mentoring session, some pedagogical elements will exist, like helping a mentee understand why he or she needs to know something or when inducing readiness to learn. These are two of the times the mentor may act more as a teacher than as a facilitator because not establishing a proper base of knowledge from which a mentee can grow can frustrate him or her and inhibit learning.⁶³

Finally, it is important to note that it is not necessary to confine reflective mentoring to a one-on-one mentoring environment. This technique is an effective method of developing a small group of individuals as well. Within a small group discussion, there will be even more experiences to contribute to the discussion which can lead to an even more enriching learning environment. Regardless of the size of the mentee group, the role of the mentor as a facilitator remains the same. The challenges of the mentor to implement the six assumptions of an adult learner for each individual learner is greater with a group, but the benefits of increased experiences may be well worth it.

Objectives and Tools for Mentoring

It is clear that there are numerous benefits to using mentoring to develop leaders. However, because of its inherent flexibility, there should not be a formal reflective mentoring syllabus established by the services; the objectives and tools needed for success already exist. In fact, formalizing reflective mentoring could actually limit its efficacy. Leaving it up to leaders to determine how to develop future leaders enables a mentor to tailor mentoring to the need of each individual mentee. The primary focus of a mentoring program should be to develop service members with the DLAs outlined by the CJCS. Besides the CJCS DLAs, there are further

developmental outcomes and attributes outlined by the services. For example, the Air Force has published within its doctrine an institutional competency list that highlights those competencies desired of all Airmen that experience, training, and education combine to develop.⁶⁴ For the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22, *Leadership*, describes competencies that the Army values in its leaders such as building trust, leading by example, and creating a positive environment.⁶⁵ Each service values different competencies and a mentor should focus his or her efforts on developing these competencies and the CJCS DLAs within his or her mentees through reflective mentoring.

There are multiple tools available for a mentor to use for reflective mentoring, but as stated earlier, the focus of reflective mentoring is not on how the mentor helps the mentee develop, but that the mentee is developing. The mentor can invoke reflection within the mentee in a multitude of ways. One simple and effective way PME programs develop leadership attributes is through selected readings and discussion. The CJCS, the three Service Chiefs, and Commandant of the Marine Corps each publish reading lists with books a mentor can use to stimulate reflection and discussion. Additionally, National Defense University Press, Air University Press, Marine Corps University Press, and Strategic Studies Institute, among others, have free books and professional publications such as *Joint Forces Quarterly* and *Air and Space Power Journal* available for all service members. Commercial publications like *Army Times*, cable news reports, case studies, leadership quotes, or even movies can serve as catalysts of professional and personal development. Simply asking an open-ended question may be all it takes for a mentee to reflect on and grow his or her leadership traits.

Additionally, reflective mentoring does not always need to center on discussion between the mentor and mentee. A mentor can ask a mentee to journal thoughts on a reading, current event,

or other topic. A mentor may challenge a mentee to discuss a topic with peers to see how different experiences can lead to different opinions. It does not matter what medium mentorship uses to stimulate reflection and development of a service member as long as the mentor ensures the mentorship remains focused on the learning of the mentee.

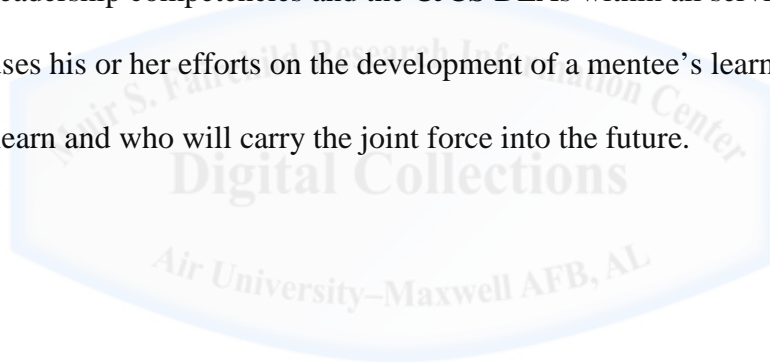
To maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the mentoring program, it is valuable for the mentor and mentee to be prepared for mentoring sessions. After deciding together what they wish to focus on, the mentor and mentee both need adequate time to review materials used for mentoring and complete personal reflection prior to meeting again.⁶⁶ During mentoring sessions, there are many techniques the mentor can use to facilitate discussion like asking open-ended questions, reformulating mentee statements and asking for more clarification, summarizing ideas to verify assumptions, and, most importantly, listening to the mentee and not dominating the discussion.⁶⁷ The mentor must never forget that the goal of reflective mentorship is to develop service members, not to try to impose the mentor's beliefs on the mentee.

Establishing an effective mentoring program that transcends career guidance and truly focuses on development of leaders is not easy. It takes time and effort on the part of the mentor to understand how the mentee learns and to work with the mentee to build a program that is most effective. Even more difficult may be the mentor's challenge to put his or her thoughts and beliefs aside and simply facilitate the development of the mentee's own ideas on leadership. To paraphrase Robert H. Shaffer, former dean of students at Indiana University, a mentor must view a mentee not as an empty bottle to be filled, but as a candle to be lit.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The professional and personal development of leaders of all ranks within the US military must be a deliberate and continuous process throughout their careers. The current system limits

deliberate leadership development to periodic PME attendance and is insufficient. To develop the DLAs that the CJCS identifies as necessary for the joint force, leaders must take a personal responsibility to develop their subordinates. An effective way to develop leaders outside of the PME system is through mentorship. Effective mentorship is unique from counseling or coaching and goes beyond just providing career guidance to a mentee. A reflective mentoring relationship effectively drives the mentee toward reflection on topics that will develop him or her personally and professionally. For reflective mentoring to be successful, the mentor must understand how the mentee learns and tailor mentorship to optimize learning and development. There are many tools and techniques available to facilitate reflective mentoring, but the goal should be to develop service specific leadership competencies and the CJCS DLAs within all service members. A mentor who focuses his or her efforts on the development of a mentee's learning will help build leaders eager to learn and who will carry the joint force into the future.



Endnotes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography)

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